

Ukraine – conflict

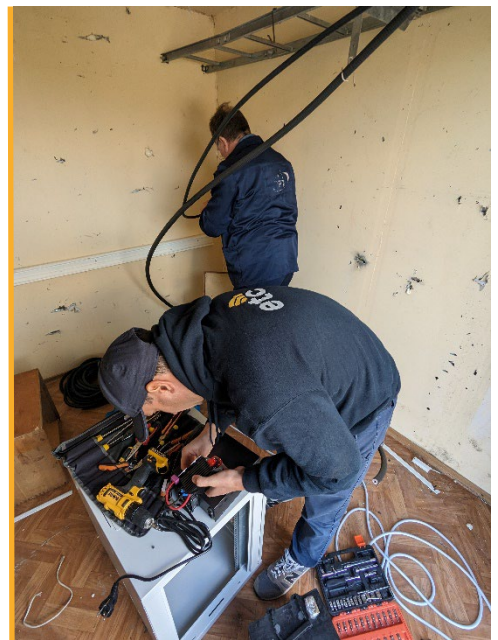
ETC Situation Report #29

Reporting period: 01/11/2023 to 30/11/2023

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) was activated in Ukraine on 03 March 2022 following the escalation of armed conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. ETC SitReps are distributed monthly.

Highlights

- In November, new radio repeaters were installed in Kharkiv and Luch (for Kherson oblast) in collaboration with the Ukrainian Broadcasting, Radiocommunications & Television Concern (BRT) to expand the VHF radio coverage in Ukraine. This activity has been implemented in three out of the five planned locations.
- The ETC continues its large-scale radio re-programming project for UN agencies in line with the new additional frequencies. Around 87% of handheld radios and 72% of vehicle radios required in the plan have been reprogrammed. The ETC is collaborating with each agency's ICT staff on the reprogramming process.
- The ETC has initiated an 'Invincibility Points' project in Novyi Buh, Mykolaiv oblast, to support the affected population with internet connectivity. In 2022, Novyi Buh was close to the frontline and the local community is still struggling with basic connectivity needs. The ETC and the local Internet Service Provider (ISP) conducted a joint field assessment on 21 November to plan the project.



The ETC and BRT install the VHF radio repeater in Kherson oblast on 09 November to expand radio coverage in the southern regions of Ukraine. Photo: WFP/ETC

Overview

The situation in Ukraine continues to worsen, with persistent airstrikes and ground battles causing widespread devastation to lives, livelihoods, civilian infrastructure, and leading to a surge in humanitarian demands.

Since the commencement of the large-scale attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the toll has exceeded 27,768 civilian casualties, encompassing 9,806 fatalities and 17,962 injuries as of 08 October, according to the [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#). The [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#) reports that approximately 3.7 million people have become internally displaced in Ukraine due to the

conflict as of 25 September. Additionally, the [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#) estimates that the global count of Ukrainian refugees has surpassed 6.3 million as of 27 November.

Impact on telecommunications

Ongoing reports indicate significant disturbances to mobile and satellite telephony services in regions near the frontlines. The ETC is actively assessing a solution to provide communications services and equipment for responders deployed in frontline missions.

Amid the escalating conflict, cyberattacks persist. These attacks vary, affecting service availability in certain instances and targeting the unauthorized release of data in others. The ETC remains committed to safeguarding its connectivity services and employs advanced firewall protection implemented in collaboration with Cisco.

ETC Activities

Coordination

In November, the ETC submitted its inputs into the Ukraine 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP), coordinated by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). In 2024, the cluster will prioritize the extension and deployment of security communications services in the areas close to the front line, as well as to the central and western parts of Ukraine, remotely connecting the VHF radio network via the internet to be monitored by the UNDSS Security Information and Operations Centre (SIOC) in Kyiv. Further, the ETC will support a shared pool of mobile communications modules, prepositioned in the common operational areas—Dnipro, Kharkiv, Odesa, Kyiv—dedicated to UN armoured vehicles and inter-agency convoys. In addition, the cluster plans to provide digital tools to enhance affected people’s access to humanitarian information and assist national and local authorities to support the affected population.

The ETC in Ukraine launched the 2023 user satisfaction survey from 03 to 24 October. A total of 52 participants responded. Participants reported an overall user satisfaction rate of 99% for ETC services and activities provided in Ukraine. The survey revealed:

- 99% satisfaction rate for ETC services;
- 99% satisfaction rate for the quality of ETC coordination;
- 99% satisfaction rate for ETC Information Management products to support operational decision making.

The full ETC user satisfaction survey report will be published in December to identify areas of improvement, better understand the needs of humanitarians, and how to enhance ETC services and activities in 2024.

Security communications (radio)

VHF radio network

The ETC is maintaining its partnership with the Ukrainian Broadcasting, Radiocommunications & Television Concern (BRT) to extend the coverage of the VHF radio

network. The first part of the expansion aims to enhance and provide security communication services in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Lviv, and Luch.

In November, the new repeaters in Kharkiv and Luch (for Kherson oblast) were installed in collaboration with the BRT, and the expanded coverage will be mapped. The planned installation of VHF radio repeaters in Dnipro and Lviv are postponed due to weather issues in Ukraine—heavy snow and ice has made it unsafe to perform high-altitude works. The BRT engineers will start the installations as soon as possible when the weather conditions are acceptable. To power the VHF repeaters, the ETC received and dispatched power backup devices for the installations in Dnipro, Kharkiv, and Luch.

On 01 November, the ETC supported the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) with installations of two VHF mobile radios in their vehicles in Dnipro. On 09 November, the cluster supported IOM with the final installation of their VHF base station. The ETC visited the UNDSS office in Dnipro on 16 November to maintain radio equipment and to add the power supply module to the current repeater setup.

Separately, the ETC installed a VHF radio base station in the WFP office in Dnipro on 23 November to enhance the service.

Security & Information Operations Centre (SIOC)

The ETC finalised the SIOC equipment setup and its relocation to a permanent location in support of UNDSS. On 07 November, the ETC completed the following installations:

- Radio equipment for the VHF network which includes one base station to monitor the Kyiv repeater, current and planned Remote Sites and Remote Site on Vehicle (RSoV) kits;
- Satellite phone equipment which includes one Iridium docking stations and one iCOM Push-To-Talk (PTT) base station together with one spare external Iridium antenna on the roof;
- Internet connectivity of the SIOC which consists of a main fibre cable and back-up Starlink satellite connections.

The SIOC was fully relocated to the new location on 17 November.

Radio programming

The ETC continues its large-scale radio re-programming project for UN agencies in line with the new additional frequencies. Around 87% (1351 out of 1631) of handheld radios and 72% (328 out of 387) of vehicle radios required in the plan have been reprogrammed. The ETC is collaborating with each agency's ICT staff on the reprogramming process.

In November, the cluster reprogrammed 252 VHF handheld radios, 37 VHF mobile radios and two base stations for WFP, IOM, WHO, OCHA, UNOPS, World Bank, UNDP, UNDSS, UNFPA, FAO, and OHCHR in Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Poltava and received equipment to reprogramme remotely for other locations in Ukraine.

ETC radio programming services can be requested through a ticketing system via email: ukraine.etc servicedesk@wfp.org

Remote Site on Vehicle (RsoV) project

The ETC continues to deploy the RsoV project—a pilot mobile VHF radio solution that can offer secure communications in UN armoured vehicles operating in high-risk areas.

The ETC provides technical assistance and supports WFP, OCHA, UNFPA, UNDSS, and UNHCR with a technical assessment of their vehicles for RsoV cabling and Starlink connectivity installation at the local vehicle workshop, located in Kyiv. Among all the agencies, there are eight vehicles with finished pre-cabling and 13 vehicles which are planned to be pre-cabled. The cluster plans to start the pre-cabling process of 22 Logistics Cluster trucks in December.

Capacity building

The ETC is formulating a security communications training plan for Ukraine following the acquisition of additional licenses and the completion of the new VHF radio network design in September. The cluster is currently conducting a refreshed series of training sessions to enhance awareness and understanding of the radio configuration and channel usage associated with the new VHF radio network design in Ukraine.

On 07 and 08 November, the cluster held a series of radio training sessions for 27 IOM staff in Lviv and on 17 November, the ETC held a security communications training session in Dnipro for 13 UNDP staff. During the mission in Kharkiv on 15 November, the cluster conducted a short security communications training for IOM Fleet and Security staff regarding the new code plug and frequencies.

Secure data connectivity

The ETC continues to support data connectivity services in the inter-agency hubs in Odesa, Kharkiv, and Lviv. 70 unique humanitarian workers used ETC internet connectivity services in these hubs in November.

ETC ICT Helpdesk

The ETC ICT helpdesk is ready to support humanitarian workers in Kyiv, Dnipro, Odesa, and Lviv. On 16 November, the ETC supported the Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster (FSLC) with audio-visual equipment during their training organised for partners in Dnipro.

Services for communities

The ETC has initiated an 'Invincibility Points' project in Novyi Buh, Mykolaiv oblast, to support the affected population with internet connectivity. In 2022, Novyi Buh was close to the frontline and the local community is still struggling with basic connectivity needs. The ETC and the local Internet Service Provider (ISP) conducted a joint field assessment on 21 November. Quotations were received from the ISP on 24 November and the team will start project implementation.

On 07, 14, and 21 November, the ETC together with CLEAR Global and the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Working Group conducted three 'Plain Language' sessions, with a specific focus on Protection. A total of 39 participants attended, including six from UN agencies, 25 from international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and 19 from local

NGOs. The 'Plain Language' approach is a communication workshop centered around clarity, aiming to assist humanitarians in connecting with affected individuals as effectively as possible.

On 22 November, the cluster participated in a joint meeting with the UN Cash Working Group (CWG) and OCHA on the development of the Chatbot and agreed on definitions of roles and responsibilities, structure, and the name of the Chatbot. The ETC developed the documents as well as the work plan and continues to engage closely with OCHA and the CWG focal point for the project.

The WFP Cooperating Partner Committee (CPC) has issued a recommendation not to pursue the proposal to set up a Common Feedback Mechanism (CFM) call centre in Ternopil, which aimed to support local authorities to communicate with the affected population. Western Ukraine is not a current geographical priority for this activity and the proposed call centre may duplicate the efforts of existing government and humanitarian hotlines.

Dashboard

See the [ETC Dashboard](#) for an overview of service locations.

Funding

The funds received by the ETC in Ukraine in 2022 are still being utilized in 2023 for the completion of projects initiated in 2022.

Funding of US\$921,000 was received in May 2023 from the Government of Japan towards the cluster's US\$1.4 million funding requirement to carry out activities in 2023. These activities include the expansion of the VHF radio networks to the frontlines in eastern Ukraine.

In November, the ETC and WFP USA finalized an application proposal for an in-kind equipment donation from Global ETC partner, Cisco Crisis Response. This equipment is planned to secure the VHF radio backbone network.

Challenges

The security issues in recently opened areas in eastern Ukraine are impeding the deployment of telecommunications solutions.

The risk of cyber-attacks is considered high in the region.

Contacts

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Further information related to ETC operations can be found on the website:

www.etcluster.org/emergency/ukraine-conflict

For more information or to be added or deleted from the mailing list please contact:

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